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AN HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
NORTH KINGSTOWN,
DELIVERED AT WICKFORD

July 4th, 1876,

BY

David Sherman Baker, Jr.



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In accordance with the recommendations of the President and Congress of the United States, and the State Legislature (transmitted by His Excellency Governor Henry Lippitt) that appropriate exercises be held in the several towns of Rhode Island, on the one hundredth anniversary of American Independence and an historical sketch of each town be read on that occasion the Town Council of North Kingstown at its regular meeting, May 8, nominated David S. Baker, Jr. to prepare an Historical Address, and appointed Chas. Sisson, Chas. T. Crombe and Allen Reynolds of the Council a Committee of Arrangements.

At the meeting of the Council, June 11, the sum of \$200 was appropriated to enable the Committee of Arrangements to carry out the purposes of their appointment.

(*From Rhode Island Pendulum, July 9, 1876.*)

The One Hundredth Anniversary of American Independence was celebrated here in a manner worthy the centennial year. The proceedings plainly showed, that even North Kingstown can be aroused once in a hundred years at least. The day was clear and pleasant, though warm and dusty, as usual on the Fourth of July. At six o'clock A. M. the village bells rang forth the peals of Liberty, as first it was proclaimed from Independence Hall, one hundred years ago. At seven o'clock the St. Bernard Catholic Temperance Society was escorted to the railroad station by the Annaquatucket Temple of Honor, where they took the 8 A. M. train for East Greenwich. At ten o'clock, a procession was formed at the town house for the purpose of escorting the Poet and Orator of the day, etc., to the First Baptist Church, where the exercises were held. The procession was commanded by Col. Elisha Dyer, Jr., Chief Marshal, assisted by Lieutenants E. R. Johnson and P. M. Nichols, and marched through the streets in the following order :

Narragansett Cornet Band.

Chief Marshal and Aid.

Narragansett Fire Engine Company.

Beacon Lodge, I. O. O. F., No. 38.

Carriage containing Committee of Arrangements.

Carriage containing Poet and Orator of the day, and Clergy.

Carriage containing Rearder of the Declaration of Independence, and President of the Town Council.

Carriage containing Town Officers.


Annaquatucket Temple of Honor.

After the procession had entered, the church was crowded to overflowing. Mr. Chas. Sisson presided. At eleven o'clock the exercises were opened with music by the band. Prayer was then offered by the Rev. Dr. Williams. After more music by the band, the Declaration of Independence was read by Mr. William C. Baker. At the conclusion of the reading, the national hymn was sung by the choir of the Baptist church. The chairman then introduced the Poet of the day, Harrison G. O. Gardiner, Esq., who proceeded to read the poem.

After the audience were again favored with music by the band, the Orator of the day, David S. Baker, Jr., Esq., was introduced. * * * *

At the close of the oration the congregation arose and joined with the choir in singing "America." The benediction was then pronounced by Rev. Dr. Williams, and the assembly dispersed. The procession marched to the Town House, and was disbanded. At six p. m. the bells were again rung for half an hour. As the "shades of evening gathered round," a large concourse of people assembled near the railroad depot, where an open-air concert was given by the Narragansett Cornet Band. The music was kept up till quite late, interspersed with fireworks of various kinds. And so ended a gala day for North Kingstown.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND FELLOW CITIZENS :—

E have assembled to-day to render homage to the past. All animosities have been laid aside, and we come, free from sectional hate or party spirit, with due reverence we trust and a just appreciation of our high privilege—with an honest local pride, to lay our humble offerings upon the altar of our country. The solemnity, which marks this scene, the joy, that wells up in every breast, bespeak the sincerity of our purpose and the profound gratitude we feel for the rich inheritance, which we have received from our fathers. Nor are these emotions confined to us. While we are thus engaged, more than forty millions of our fellow countrymen send us greeting. Actuated by the same impulses, with like fervor of heart, and with lips tremulous with similar accents of praise, they have gathered, throughout the extent of our broad domains, to review the line of our country's history and across the gulf of a hundred years to commune with the spirits of the illustrious dead. It is a sacred occasion. Our fathers looked forward to it with mingled hope and apprehension, we have long hailed it from afar, and generations to come will recur to it with fondest delight. If, as the Roman orator says, "the dead behold with pleasure the fruits of their labor, while in the flesh," with what joy and wonder do the founders of this Republic, secure in immortal glory, to-day look down upon the scenes of their earthly struggles! As they gaze upon the princely magnificence of our metropolitan cities, and the unostentatious wealth of our towns; as they witness the advance in art and science and the sweet philanthropy of our various institutions; as they see the little republic of thirteen colonies, with its few inhabitants, now clasping in its embrace a continent teeming with an industrious population; and, above all, behold their children, for the most part, adhering with fidelity to the principles of manliness and virtue

which they established, could they ask a higher recompense for their toil, a more glorious reward for their sacrifices? Well may they be content, their triumph is complete! Their zeal was not that of a fanatical propagandism. The principle of self-government, of independent political action, is to-day verified. It is no chimera, nor even any longer an experiment, but it is a fact, firm and lasting as eternal truth.

The century, which terminates to-day, has been one of prodigious change. The vague ideas of social and exact science, which the ancient and mediæval philosophers handled to no purpose, have been moulded into definite conceptions and embodied in tangible forms. It has been the age of universal emancipation of thought, the era of the telegraph and of steam. In the political world, change has followed change in rapid succession, kingdoms have given place to empires, and empires have been swallowed up by republics, until scarcely a nation in Christendom maintains the same form of government it did at the beginning of the century. Europe has been the theatre of constant war and revolution. France and Spain have bowed before the sceptres of man rulers, each bringing to his assistance his favorite political scheme, only to have it set aside by his immediate successor. Ireland, for ages shrouded in error and superstition, in the long darkness of her annals has enjoyed one sublime and gladsome day, when the sun of freedom rifted the clouds that obscured her and her harp gave forth a note of joy. We have seen the separate dukedoms of Italy consolidated into one nation, and Prussia rise from a second class power and assert her supremacy over the other states of Germany. We have beheld Venice, the oldest republic in the world, stripped of her freedom and nationality; we have seen the humiliation of the papal power, and witnessed the diadem, that crowned the heads of the Caesars and adorned the brow of Charlemagne, forever laid aside by a single act of Francis the Second. Yet amid all these multifarious changes, the Republic of 1776, though at different times confronted by foreign war, and once brought face to face with civil strife, has always held to the wise tenets of its founders; and, adhering to the well-tried principles of a hundred years, still stands, in the words of a distinguished statesman, "the pride of the earth and the favorite of heaven."

A just idea of our political fabric can be obtained only by a careful examination of its parts. Tourists tell us that standing for the first time under the immense dome of St. Peters, there is unvariable experienced a feeling of disappointment. The real St. Peters is belittled by the shadowy edifice of the imagination. But after frequent visits, after walking its aisles and measuring with the eye its interminable distances; after viewing minutely its dome, its nave, its transepts, its arches and pillars; after studying the multiplicity of its architectural designs and drinking in its varied magnificence and sublimity, the great cathedral gradually expands in size and grows in beauty, until the preconceptions of it are lost in its grandeur and vastness. So to fully comprehend the magnitude and solidity, the harmony and beauty of our governmental edifice, we must study separately the elements of which it is constructed.

We may fairly conclude that to the peculiar institutions of New England, to the schools and churches, but more especially to the township, may be traced those fundamental principles—delegated legislation and equality of rights—which are the basis of our national greatness. When in the fourth century the nomadic tribes of the Tentonic family, prompted by the desire for a higher form of civilization, ceased from their wanderings and settled in territorial communities, they introduced a system of society, peculiar to themselves and hitherto unknown in European history. With the family for their basis, they consolidated into villages and divided the land into three parts, the township, the common mark and the arable mark. The body politic was composed of a class of freemen, possessing among other prerogatives the right to bear arms, to hold property and to participate in the public assemblies and “freedom implied not simply personal liberty, but positive political rights.” The early adventurers of New England came with these traditions of thirteen hundred years still fresh in their memories, and the consequence was the reproduction in the New World of the old Germanic mark. “Our mark has developed into the township, our townships have been aggregated into the State, our State has become an integral part of the nation.” Considering then the influence of the township on the political destinies of the nation, it becomes us on this occasion to look to the past,

and ascertain, as far as possible, what we as a town have contributed to the welfare of the Republic.

It was fortunate for our fathers that they were induced to seek a home in the country of the Narragansetts. Here they found a fertile soil, picturesque scenery, and a people, who, already somewhat enlightened by their intercourses with the English, bid them welcome and gave them kindly of their hospitality. Though friendly to the settlers, they were attached to their hunting grounds and gave them up with much reluctance. While Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and many of the other colonies were purchased with a few trifling presents, the country washed by the waters of Narragansett Bay, whose surpassing beauty still attracts the eye of the stranger, was prized so highly by the natives, that it was obtained only at the cost of thousands of pounds "even more" we learn from the petition sent by the colony in 1666 to the King, "than the other colonies had expended for ten times as much." It is a satisfaction to know that our homes were not acquired through conquest or dishonesty, but by free purchase at a liberal price.

In point of time, the settlement of North Kingstown may be regarded as the third in Rhode Island. In 1639, three years after the settlement of Providence, Richard Smith, a native of Gloucestershire, England, came from Taunton, where he had resided a short time, and, at the head of what is now called Point Wharf Cove, established a trading post and erected, upon the site of the present Congdon House, the first English dwelling in the Narragansett country. The materials of Smith's house were brought in boats from Taunton, and some of them were employed in constructing the present edifice. Roger Williams soon afterwards settled near Smith, but, in a few years, sold to him his interests, which included "his trading house, his two big guns and a small island (Rabbit Island) for goats." In 1656 Smith leased of the Indians, for sixty years, the tract of land upon which Wickford now stands and as far South as the Annaquatucket river. Three years later, he extended the boundaries and leased it again for one thousand years together with the region North and East of his home, now known as Calves Neck and Sawgoo. In 1660 most of these lands were absolutely quit-claimed to Smith. The tract of land at one time owned by

him was nine miles long and three miles wide. Smith, whose will was made in 1664, gave the homestead and the greater part of his lands to his son Richard, who in turn, by a will proved 1692, bequeathed the Boston Neck land to Elizabeth Viall, and the homestead and the land around Wickford to his nephew Lodowick Updike. Roger Williams, in his testimony given July 24, 1679, in favor of Smith's title says: "I humbly testify that about forty years (from this date) he kept possession, coming and going himself children and servants, and had quiet possession of his houses, lands and meadows; and there in his own house with much serenity of soul and comfort, he yielded up his spirit to God, the father of spirits, in peace." * * *

* * "I do also humbly declare that the said Richard Smith Junior ought by all the rules of equity, justice and gratitude to his honored father and himself to be fairly treated with, considered, recruited, honored and, by his majesty's authority, confirmed and established in a peaceful possession of his fathers and his own possession in this pagan wilderness and Narragansett country."

"The premises I humbly testify as now leaving this country and the world."

"Signed Roger Williams."

The next purchase of much importance was made in 1659, by Randal Holden and Samuel Gorton, who bought Fox Island and the neck of land between Wickford and Annaquatucket river. This was afterwards sold to Richard Smith. A little later, in the same year, Humphery Atherton, who came from Plymouth Colony, bought in company with others the land in Quidnessett and that part of Boston Neck, which had not already been sold to Smith. To prevent the landed proprietors from establishing a monopoly the Assembly, in 1671, ordered "that persons owning large tracts of land in Narragansett should sell it out to persons in want of it." From this time settlements became more numerous and the land began to be divided up into smaller parcels, though according to the report of the committee appointed by the General Court to make a survey of the Narragansett country, as late as 1677, the whole of Boston Neck was owned by eight individuals. It is to these purchases, which we

have enumerated, that the present owners of North Kingstown, for the most part, must trace their titles.

The Atherton purchase, which was made in direct violation of a law of Rhode Island, gave rise to a succession of difficulties, which at different times threatened the destruction of the colony. The question of jurisdiction over the Narragansett country had not yet been determined. Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts, each contended for it, but, when allowed to choose for themselves, every member of the Atherton Company (a fact which may seem strange to us) declared in favor of Connecticut, which accepted them as included in the limits of its charter and called the plantation, Wickford. (Much speculation has been rife and many fanciful derivations have been found for this name, some holding it to be an abbreviation of Lodowick's Ford, others deriving it from Wickes' Ford; names claimed by their respective advocates to have been given to the ford just north of the village, but in all probability the name was taken directly from the town of Wickford, in England.) Rhode Island not satisfied with the action of the Atherton men, since by assenting to their wishes, she would forfeit the control of a valuable territory, continued to dispute the claims of Connecticut, and during the strife, which was waged hotly on both sides, and lasted for many years, Wickford now completely organized and exerting considerable influence over the neighboring colonies, was the place selected for deliberations and consequently the centre of all contentions. Courts and commissions were of frequent occurrence, and it is impossible to describe the supercilious exhibitions of hatred made by both parties on these occasions. Connecticut commissioners frequently made proclamation of their powers and read their charter, all of which were utterly disregarded. Officers engaged in arresting persons for crimes were themselves taken into custody, on the ground that they had no power to act. When Walter House was killed by Thomas Flounders, at Wickford, in 1670, the Connecticut coronor held what was thought to be a proper inquest, but the Council, at Newport, adjudged the proceedings illegal, and sent a constable with a force of men to disinter the body and hold another inquest. This occurrence was remarkable in two particulars. It was in all probability the first deliberate killing of a white man in the Wickford colony and

the first and only instance in all history, where two considerable states contended for the privilege of holding an inquest over a corpse. The controversy was virtually settled by agreement, in 1703, and this action was confirmed, in 1726, when the King finally established the boundary line, and the King's Province (now mostly embraced in Washington County) which for fifty years had existed as an independent jurisdiction, became a part and parcel of Rhode Island.

In 1674, the General Assembly passed an act establishing a township in Narragansett and called it "Kings Town." For what reason it is impossible to say, its name, in 1686, was changed to Rochester, but three years later the original name was restored. The population of Kingstown had increased to such an extent that it was early deemed necessary that there should be a division of the town, and, in June, 1722, when Samuel Cranston was Governor, the General Assembly convened at Newport, enacted "that the town of Kingstown be divided and made into two towns, by the names of North and South Kingstown." North Kingstown held the records and was declared to be the older town. The town has once since, in 1742, suffered the loss of a large part of its territory, when the western portion was set aside and incorporated as the town of Exeter. The first town meeting, under the new organization was ordered to be held, February 21, 1723, to chose jury men, who should serve in the next General Court of Trials, and at the second town meeting, held on the third Wednesday of the following month, Robert Hull and Francis Willet were elected the first delegates to the General Assembly. At this time the population was a little less than two thousand. From the date of its incorporation the town gained additional stability, and characterized by the harmony of its government,—until the breaking out of the Revolutionary war, which shattered society throughout the colonies—maintained that peace, and was blessed with that prosperity, which invariably attend the efforts of a frugal and industrious people.

After the hardships and miseries of the early colonial periods, the beginning of the eighteenth century seemed like the dawning of a golden age. Learning received attention, tokens of courtesy and hospitality were met with on every side, stately

mansions, and here and there a church were seen towering among the trees or dotting the green fields, and the country through which Richard Smith and Roger Williams, a few years before, had with difficulty pressed their way, by the magic touch of civilization was now transformed from a wilderness into "the garden of America."

As early as 1710, three churches had been organized. In the latter part of the seventeenth century a minister by the name of Baker came from Newport and founded a Baptist church in North Kingstown. This was undoubtedly the origin of the Baptist churches in the town, three of which now exist in a flourishing condition. The church at Wickford, whose edifice was built, in 1816, and rebuilt, in 1836, was an off-shoot from the church at Allenton. The house at Allenton was erected in 1848 and the one in Quidnesett in 1842. Elder John Gardiner's six principle Baptist church, as it was styled, was founded about the year 1710. ^{five} The years prior to this the Episcopal Society erected a church in the south part of the town. It was here that, for more than thirty years, Dr. James McSparran, the friend and companion of the illustrious Berkeley, proclaimed the truth and inspired the people with his eloquence. In the year 1800, the church, which is now the oldest Episcopal edifice in New England, was removed to its present site in Wickford; and yonder just to our left, in a sequestered spot, with its outline standing boldly against the sky, surrounded by a few graves and guarded by the spirits of its holy dead, a solitary witness, it looks back upon the vicissitudes of nearly two centuries and, in a language not void of interpretation, tells again and again, for our instruction, the story of the pious endeavors and virtuous actions of those long since passed away.

The society of this period was marked by much refinement. The landed aristocracy cherished the liberal arts and literature, and secured for their children a generous intellectual training in the families of the learned clergymen. Extensive plantations, some of which have since been divided into as many as ten large farms, (Daniel Updike's lands alone, embracing three thousand acres,) were worked by slave labor, and produced abundant crops, which in the West Indies, found a ready market. A degree of sociability existed among the people, which, in some respects, their

descendants might imitate with profit. Every family had its large circle of friends, who were always welcome to its hospitality, the remotest connection by blood was regarded with profound respect, and much visiting and interchange of thought and sentiment established a permanent bond of good feeling. True some of the entertainments seemingly evinced a prodigality of wealth, but the display was generally in proportion to the abundance of the host, and excess was rather the exception than the rule. Every season had its peculiar pastimes. There was the annual excursion to Connecticut in May, the glorious old huskings of autumn, the festivities of the holidays in Winter, and at every season of the year an occasional wedding. What joy, what mirth pervaded the country on these the gala days of the olden time! Even now, enlightened by tradition, we, in imagination, stand in the spacious halls, and, surrounded by a merry throng, listen to the orchestra of slaves, and see gentlemen, with swords at their side, in crimson coats and knee breeches, with powdered wigs and queues; and ladies, dressed in brocade and cushioned head-dresses, gracefully walking the intricate mazes of the minuet.

The slaves, who formed a large part of the population—one family sometimes owning as many as forty,—were not slow in imitating the manners and amusements of their masters. But of all their festivities none compared with that of the annual election, when, after the manner of the whites, they chose their Governor for the year. On these occasions the parlors of the mansion houses were thrown open, horses were provided, and money distributed among the negroes according to the means of their respective owners. Party spirit ran high, and partymateering was much resorted to. At the appointed time, arrayed in their masters' clothes, and mounted on the best pacers, with their ladies at their sides, in high glee, they rode to "lection." Here, after games and sports of various kinds, the friends of the two candidates were arranged in two rows and the chief marshal, with his assistants, marched between them and made the count. In a loud voice he then proclaimed the Governor for the ensuing year. Then followed the grand election dinner, which was held under the trees,—the Governor elect, sitting at the head of the table and on either side his wife and the unsuc-

cessful candidate, whose prerogative^{time} it was to propose the first toast, and then and there forever drown the sorrows of his defeat. For both master and slave these were sunny days.

The history of North Kingstown, at the time of which we have spoken, though not marked by startling and heroic deeds, is rich in a few names, without which a sketch however succinct would be incomplete. It was then that the scholarly Updike and the illustrious Stuart lived, and Whaley, whose life has been an unsolved enigma, then began his mysterious career.

Colonel Daniel Updike, whose grand-father, Gilbert Updike, came from New York, in 1663, and, shortly afterward, married the daughter of Richard Smith, the first settler, was the most distinguished advocate of his time. He was a gentleman of great urbanity and of sound erudition. "Among his professional brethren he was highly respected, and in all literary and professional associations of his day his name stood at the head." He was two years Attorney of King's (now Washington) county, and twenty-four years, Attorney General of the colony of Rhode Island. His whole life reflected honor upon his native town, and, when, in 1757, he passed away, he transmitted to her an unsullied fame and bequeathed to his descendants those polite and manly traits of character by which they have ever been distinguished.

The history of Theophilus Whaley, simply from the mystery which has always surrounded it, is of more than ordinary interest. He is described as a bold and energetic man, possessing a collegiate education, conversant with Greek and Hebrew, affable and kind, but always reticent in regard to his former life. He is supposed to have been one of the regicide judges, who condemned Charles the First. The people of Narragansett, especially his descendants, believed it, and his scholarly attainments and the secluded manner of his life, together with the fact of his receiving visits from distinguished strangers, who invariably left him well supplied with money, would rather confirm than disprove it. Whaley and Goffe were supposed to reside in this country, and numerous spies were sent out from England to apprehend them. They were both well known swordsmen, and it is related that on one occasion, while Whaley was visiting in Boston, a spy disguised as a juggler, after performing various

feats of swordmanship, with the intention of drawing the regicides out, should they chance to be present, challenged any one in the audience to engage with him in friendly combat. Whaley, who could not forego the opportunity of exercising his favorite sport, immediately accepted the challenge, selected a sword, and, to the great surprise of all, at the first thrust, disarmed his antagonist, who, now sure of the object of his search, cried, "Seize him; he is either Goffe, Whaley, or the devil!" With his usual good fortune Whaley managed to escape and lived years afterwards to tell the story.

A few rods north of Whaley's cave, which is still pointed out on the east bank of the Pettaquamscott river, shaded by three or four venerable old willows stands the first snuff mill erected in New England,—now a modest looking dwelling, unpainted, and devoid of architectural beauty, yet, from its associations, sacred to the antiquarian, to the student and to all true lovers of art. Here was born a genius, whose fame was destined to extend beyond the narrow limits of his native town and dazzle with its lustre the Courts of the Old World. It is the birth-place, the early home of Gilbert Stuart, the greatest painter, in his speciality, that America has ever produced and, in his time, second only to Sir Joshua Reynolds in the world. He was a man somewhat eccentric in character, of brilliant intellectual powers, and a sincere lover of his profession. It is impossible to measure the influence of Stuart's early training upon his subsequent career, but it is evident that that independence of spirit, which led him—though an ardent admirer and diligent student of the old masters—to avoid imitation and declare nature his only guide, may be traced, in a large degree, to his native freedom of action and the picturesque surroundings of his youth. His childhood days were passed in a spot environed by beauty and complete in romantic grandeur. Standing, on a beautiful June morning, in the room where Stuart was born, as we looked out upon the green hills and the valley, reaching far above and below the house, and heard the songs of the birds mingled with the murmuring of the brook, which flows just beneath the window, we could not but believe that it was the inspiration of similar scenes, that fired the soul, already warm from the touch of genius, and first awakened in the breast of the youthful painter a longing for a

higher attainment in his art. The great artist was proud of his humble origin and at all times, even in the presence of rank and title, spoke of his birth-place with tenderness and love. One of the last acts of his life, was to visit the old home, and enjoy for a while the scenes of his boyhood days. Stuart's laurels are still green, his fame is still enduring, and in spite of chance and time, so long as patriotism and virtue shall be respected, so long as men shall honor art, should no other evidence of his worth remain, it will still glow in the undying colors, that immortalize the form and features of glorious Washington. If Stuart boasted of his native town, well may she be proud of her honored and illustrious son.

For many years the people of North Kingstown lived in unbroken peace. The bitter feelings engendered by the controversy for jurisdiction had long-since been allayed, the inhumanities of the Indian wars, were almost forgotten and even the terrible night of December 20th, 1675, when the remnant of the English army, chilled and weary, marched from the battle field of the "Big Swamp" and pillowed their heads upon the snows of Wickford, lived only in the memories of the aged. The people for a long time had quietly pursued their avocations and a spirit of progress seemed to pervade the town. New roads were opened, various enterprises projected and the social and political status much improved.

The first provision made by the town for the maintenance of its poor was in 1769, when the freeholders of North Kingstown representing that they were greatly burdened with poor people and that a work-house, in which to employ them, would be of great advantage, "prayed the General Assembly to grant them a lottery, to raise the sum of one hundred and twenty pounds, lawful money to be applied towards the building of said work-house agreeable to the scheme presented with the petition." The petition was granted. It is impossible to say how long this system was in vogue, but from time immemorial the poor have been farmed out to the lowest bidder and the keeper annually elected in town meeting. A few years ago, in 1868, the town purchased a farm and erected suitable buildings, where the unfortunate may now be well provided for and enjoy the comforts and conveniences of a home. It may seem strange to us, that

philanthropy should call to its aid such an auxiliary as the lottery, but in those days this manner of raising money was resorted to in every emergency. By it public works were constructed, churches were built and the losses of individuals reimbursed. We read, that, in 1762, "a lottery to raise \$4,500 was granted, by the General Assembly, to William Wall and Henry Wall of North Kingstown, whose merchandise was destroyed by fire in Newport." In the five years, ending 1775, no less than thirteen religious societies, in Rhode Island, of every denomination, were granted lotteries to assist them in building or repairing their houses of worship. We will not venture to assert the origin of modern church entertainments, but will merely suggest to the rigid opponents of clambakes and festivals, who still adhere to the good old customs of the past, that they might augment the grounds of their dislike and fortify their arguments against these pernicious evils, by tracing them directly to the lottery system of former times.

The uninterrupted quiet and prosperity, which the town had so long enjoyed, was now to give place to the turmoil, which necessarily precedes war. New industries were no longer contemplated, business in general began to languish, and the depths of society were stirred by the adverse winds of political opinion.

Though the plan for a federal union of the colonies, at Albany, in 1754, failed of adoption, it made a lasting impression on the minds of the colonists. At first the idea was a novel one, but in a few years its practicability was so apparent, that the most prudent foresaw the advantages, not only of union but of independence, and questions were rife and events transpiring, which were to culminate in the act, that renders the fourth of July, 1776, a day memorable in the annals of the world.

North Kingstown early caught the spirit of independence and was ardent in the cause of liberty. Already she had extended her sympathy, in the substantial form of money and cattle, to the citizens of Boston, who were suffering from the aggressions of the British soldiery, and February 16, 1775, more than a month before the battle of Lexington, the people of this town, now organized for action, called for one hundred and forty guns. These were promptly furnished, and in the following month, the committee appointed by the General Assembly ap-

portioned to the town its share of powder, lead and flints. In June of the same year, Charles Tillinghast and two others were appointed enlisting officers for the town. From this time companies were formed and enlistments continued to be made; and during the whole war North Kingstown's sons fought in many battles on sea and land. When, in 1777, General Washington ordered the Continental troops, in Rhode Island, to join the army in the Jerseys, it left the State in an almost defenseless condition. North Kingstown, whose geographical position rendered attacks from the bay an easy matter, was especially open to the incursions of the enemy. It was at this time that George Waite Babcock, Joseph Taylor, John Slocum and Christopher Pearce, "having the welfare of their country at heart and willing to defend it with their lives," believing that the enemy were about to make an attack, raised a company "to guard the town of Updike's Newtown" and petitioned the Assembly to grant them a charter. "Whereupon it was voted and resolved that the petitioners with such others as shall enlist with them, not exceeding sixty-four men exclusive of commissioned officers, be incorporated into a separate and distinct military company by the name of the Newtown Rangers, to be commanded by one captain, two lieutenants and one ensign." By an act of the legislature, in 1778, slaves were allowed to enlist. Soon afterwards a large company, composed wholly of negroes (many of whom had been slaves) and officered by white men, was raised in the town, and Thomas Cole and Benjamin Peckham were chosen captain and lieutenant.

During the whole war, North Kingstown was frequently annoyed by predatory incursions. Small parties would stealthily land along the shore and plunder the people of their cattle and grain, and, on some occasions, they would even seize the inhabitants themselves. At one time Oliver Spink and Charles Tillinghast, who was the grand-father of Senator Charles T. James, and who, it will be remembered, was the first enlisting officer appointed in the town, were taken from their houses, in Quiddnessett, and imprisoned in Newport. Here they contracted the small-pox, of which Spink died, but Tillinghast, who with true yankee ingenuity had previously vaccinated himself, passed safely through the disease. In June, 1779, a number of British

soldiers landed, in the night, on the Quidnessett shore and surrounded the houses of John Allen and Christopher Spencer. The inmates, who at the time were asleep, were awakened and rudely turned out of doors, and Allen's house was burned to the ground. The one in which Spencer lived belonged to a Tory, and on that account escaped destruction. Half clad and terribly frightened, the other members of the two families were commanded silence, and by the light of the burning dwelling, saw Allen and Spencer marched at the bayonet's point to the shore, roughly thrust into a boat, and carried to Newport. Here they were confined in a loathsome prison, where Spencer remained until the English troops evacuated Rhode Island; but Allen, through the intercession of a lady friend of his family, was released a few months before.

Early in the war the General Assembly voted "that one of the field pieces assigned to South Kingstown should be sent to and for the use of North Kingstown." The story of this old gun is as remarkable as it is interesting. It once saved Wickford from destruction, and again, as if to repay the debt, won great glory for the town, which originally loaned it. In 1777, a company was sent out in a barge from the British fleet to burn the village of Wickford, which was supposed to be undefended. They proceeded unmolested, until they arrived at the mouth of the harbor, when, to their great surprise, the old gun, which had been stationed on the point where the light house now stands, fired into them, killed one man, and caused them to hastily retrace their course. Soon after this occurrence news came that a British man-of-war had grounded on Point Judith. Excitement ran high and the old gun was again resorted to; but upon examination it was discovered that the Tories had spiked it. This difficulty was speedily removed. Samuel Bissell drilled it out, and, in a few hours, drawn by four oxen, it was on its way to the "Point," where it was mounted on the shore, behind the rocks, and, after a vigorous firing of a few minutes, the ship, which proved to be the Syren, a twenty-eight gun frigate, surrendered, and her crew of a hundred and sixty-six officers and men, were carried prisoners to Providence.

George Babcock, whose name heads the petition for the charter of the Newtown Rangers, was afterwards one of the most suc-

cessful commanders in the American navy. In the Mifflin, a twenty gun ship, manned by 130 men, enlisted in North Kingstown and Exeter, he took prize after prize, and many an abler ship struck her colors, before the invincible courage of Babcock and his men. While cruising off the Banks of Newfoundland, in 1779, they fell in with the English ship Tartar, mounting twenty-six guns, fourteen swivels, and with a complement of 162 men. The odds weighed heavily against them; but, after a fierce engagement of two hours and a half, the enemy struck her flag, and a few days afterwards, amid the wildest enthusiasm, the firing of guns, the ringing of bells and the illumination of the city, James Eldred, a Wickford boy, who had been placed in command of the Tartar, with a number of other prizes, sailed triumphantly into the harbor of Boston.

Samuel Phillips, a man distinguished for his bravery, whose uncle the Hon. Peter Phillips was commissary, under General Nathaniel Greene, in "The army of Observation," was at this time Lieutenant of the Mifflin. Two years before with Daniel Wall, his fellowtownsman, he volunteered under Colonel Barton, and commanded one of the five boats, in the daring expedition, that captured Prescott and brought him safely through the British fleet. In a journal written by himself Captain Phillips says: "I have been, in the late war, Lieutenant of four twenty gun ships, one cutter of fourteen guns, and Commander of a brig of fourteen guns. I have ever strove hard and suffered much to help gain the independence of my country, and am ready to step forth again and oppose any power, that shall endeavor to injure my country and her rights." What sentiments of patriotism! What loyalty to duty! What willingness for sacrifice! It is the spirit here exemplified, that has, in all ages of the world, wherever tyranny has assailed the right, fortified the courage of the oppressed and proved:—

"The might that slumbers in a peasants arm."

It was this that gave hope and strength to the soldier in the long campaign, and, at last, wrought out the realization of that early dream of independence, which first moved the American colonists to action.

The close of the Revolution found the condition of society in

North Kingstown completely changed. Says Updike, in his history of the Narragansett Church, "by that event we became another and a new people." The war had left a deep and effectual mark on all classes. Extreme poverty pervaded the homes of the yeomanry, and many of the aristocratic land-holders, who had espoused the cause of the mother country, had been disfranchised and their property confiscated. Slavery had been abolished, the law of primogeniture had been repealed, and, of the large estates, some had changed owners and others had been divided up into numberless farms. The acrimony of party strife had dissipated the friendly feeling and the social intercourse of the past, and the luxury, the hospitality, the refinement, which characterized the landed proprietors, before the war, had forever disappeared.

In the vote taken by Rhode Island, in 1788 upon the adoption of the Constitution, North Kingstown stood two in favor and one hundred and sixty opposed. It may seem an anomalous fact, in our history, that the town, which was among the earliest to act, in the cause of independence, and among the most energetic, in prosecuting the war, should have almost unanimously rejected that instrument, which, framed in wisdom, has ever been the shield of our political rights and the admiration of the world. But can no reason be assigned for this? Are we justly charged with indifference, with a want of enthusiasm? No! The Constitution was a new departure in state-craft, its efficacy was then an untried fact—a possibility, a probability, upon which hung the destiny of the Republic, and which demanded the severest, the most logical deliberation. Once convinced of its practicability, no people were more ready to receive it, none have been more willing to defend it than our own. In this, as in many hurriedly projected schemes, which have failed to enlist the sympathy of the town, and which have called down upon her the reproach often of her own thoughtless sons, she has aimed to profit by the precipitous blunders of others, and has followed that wiser conservative principle, which argues, that it is better to be born gently along on the tide of prosperity than to chase a phantom to destruction.

The begining of the present century marks a new era in the progress of the town. Traces of the late war were fast disap-

pearing, society assumed a more cheerful aspect and a commercial interest was awakened, which gave much promise for the future. An extensive coast trade had sprung up and intercourse with the West Indies, which the war had interrupted, was resumed. Brigs and schooners and ships were loaded, at the wharves in Wickford, with the crops of the country far around, and sent out to exchange them for the tropical products of the Antilles. Few places in Rhode Island witnessed greater mercantile activity than Wickford, which even rivaled Providence, and bid fair, with its surpassing facilities, to become one of the leading emporiums of the state. Providence merchants seeing the advantages, which Wickford possessed for foreign trade caught the spirit of enterprise, and the founder of the present firm of "Brown and Ives" even went so far as to negotiate for land along the harbor; but the owners demanded exorbitant prices and so the welfare of the town was sacrificed to the penuriousness of individuals. An attempt was also made to secure the Connecticut Valley trade, and with this in view a road was surveyed to Jewett City, but, before the plans were matured, Providence, anticipating the benefit of such a move, had laid out the turnpike road; and this fact with the sudden death of Remington Southwick, the most earnest advocate of the scheme, disheartened the others interested and the project was abandoned.

Nearly all the vessels employed, at this time, were not only owned in the town, but were launched from the ship yards in Wickford, and old inhabitants remember, when there were as many as five large vessels, at one time, on the stocks. Ship building was carried on in nearly every port of the town. Captain John McKinzie, an extensive builder, pursued his business near the site of the present Bobbin Mill; the Union, a full rigged ship, (with two exceptions, we are informed, the largest, at that time, in the state) was constructed North of Gardiner's wharf, and, in 1816, at the extreme head of the cove, just South-east of Mr. James Greene's residence, was built the sloop Resolution, more familiarly styled the "Reso"—that old Argonautic craft, whose name will always be synonymous with huckleberries and "lections."

The industries, which we have described, were unfortunately destined to be short lived. The coast trade gradually declined, ship building entirely ceased, and, in a few years, the last West-India-Man, disappeared. But what the village of Wickford lost North Kingstown gained. The enterprise of the town was simply turned into new channels. Instead of beholding vessels, going and coming, and wharves, filled with merchandise, looking beyond the limits of the village, the eye became accustomed to different scenes; new communities were springing up, and the echoing sounds of adz and hammer, as they were plied in constructing the last vessel built in Wickford, were answered from surrounding hill and valley by the voice of the loom and the busy hum of machinery. The old snuff mills and grist mills were torn down, and substantial factories erected upon their sites; and, while Wickford is to-day completely shorn of her commerce, and owns scarcely a large vessel, North Kingstown is rich, in a manufacturing interest, which, including four cotton and eight woolen mills, has an invested capital of between one and two millions, and gives employment to nearly five hundred people. The beautiful and thrifty villages, which nestle along the various streams that intersect the town, Davisville, LaFayette, Hamilton, Annaquatucket, Belleville and others, betoken the prosperity of the town, and speak eloquently of the enterprise of their managers and founders.

The people of this town have always been characterized by a profound respect for education. As early as 1696, "a tract of land, in the town of Kingstown, was conveyed to Harvard College for and towards the support and education at the said college of those youths, whose parents were not of sufficient ability to maintain them." Learning, however, until the present century, was confined to the wealthy and imparted by private tutors. Public schools were unknown, and the so-called old-fashioned school houses are comparatively of modern origin. The first of which we have any notice was built, in Quidnessett, about the year 1806, but in a few years the domestic interests absorbed the educational, and the school house was joined to the dwelling of Hon. John Allen. In 1820, the legislature first appropriated money for public schools, and in the same year the town was divided into districts. From this time an increased inter-

est was manifested in educational matters, school houses were multiplied, and the public school system was established upon a broad and philanthropic basis.

The serious thinkers of the country early foresaw that the only means of perpetuating that liberty, which the sacrifices and hardships of a seven years war had secured, was by the universal dissemination of truth and learning among the common people. Nowhere is this principle better exemplified, than in the preamble of the original charter, granted, at the June Session of the Legislature, 1800, to the Washington Academy. "Whereas institutions for liberal education are highly beneficial to society, by forming the rising generation to virtue, knowledge and useful literature, and thus preserving a succession of men qualified for discharging the offices of life, with usefulness and reputation, they have therefore justly merited and received the public attention and encouragement of every wise, polished and well regulated State." Founded upon this principle, we can only wonder that its usefulness, instead of diminishing has not enlarged from time to time. During the first years of its history, it was in reality "a light set upon a hill," and the refulgent rays that streamed from its portals illumined our own community and lighted up the dark places of other towns and states. It was the first Academy in Rhode Island, and, under the management of Alpheus Baker and Remington Southwick, the first elected principal and assistant, who were men of large ideas and of valuable acquisition, it ranked, in reputation and proficiency, second only to Brown University. Young men here completed their education, who were to adorn with their culture the walks of private life, and some, who were to fill the highest office in the State. Strange as it may seem, the Academy, which entered upon its career with such brilliant prospects, soon degenerated into a district school. Its charter in a few years, through the negligence of its Trustees, was annulled, and, in 1848, districts three and four leased the building and grounds, for ninety-nine years, at the rate of one cent per annum. In the autumn of 1874, the hand of vandalism leveled the old edifice with the ground; and in its place, crowning the beautiful hill that overlooks the village, and surrounded by an extensive play ground, with airy and convenient halls, appears

a structure, which is an ornament to the village, and of which North Kingstown may well be proud.

As we stated at the outset, it had been our purpose, all along, to illustrate, by specific example, the influence of the New England township on the destinies of the nation. We have seen our own town, a small territorial community, complete in outline from its settlement, gradually developing, with all the powers and privileges of the old Germanic mark, and forming a political unit in the Federal Union of towns and states. As, in accomplishing our task, we have passed from the colonial period to the present time, fain would we, here and there, have paused by the way-side, and plucked the flowers of fact and tradition, that have sprung up along the beaten path of our social and political history. But for wearying your patience, gladly would we relate the success of the ambitious triumvirate, who discovered the treasures of Kidd, and tell the melancholy story of the elopement from the Block House. If time permitted, we would describe our ample resources, the development of our industries, the growth of our banks, and, with pleasure, show the part North Kingstown took in the second war, with the mother country; how her privateers preyed on the enemy's commerce and embarrassed her navy, and how many of her sons for the cause of freedom suffered, with heroic fortitude, in Dartmoor prison. * North Kingstown's action in the late rebellion needs no encomium. She heard the first call for men, and scarcely had the smoke cleared away from Sumter, when her sons were marching to the front. Her decision was noble, her devotion complete. The flowers that bloom over the graves of her heroes, in yonder cemetery, are vocal with lessons of patriotism and of sacrifice.

Fellow citizens our past is secure. As a town, as a state, as a nation, we have a record unparalleled in the course of time, a history from which even the countries of the Old World may glean instruction, and from which we and our children may learn much wisdom for future guidance.

There is a belief current among the French, that once a year the great Napoleon marshals his forces on the Champ de Mars.

Then the veterans from Marengo, from Friedland, from Austerlitz, the heroes who struggled in the sunny clime of Italy and of Spain, who dyed the snows of Russia with their blood and who fought beneath the shade of the Pyramids, rise from their graves and, with the Old Guard at their head, march, with majestic mein, by the form of their loved commander. Would, to-day, we could marshal the spirits of our glorious dead! Would, as we turn to the past for the last time before we cross the threshold of a new century, we could behold the benignant smile and drink in the sweet counsel of the sages of Vernon, of Braintree and of Monticello! With what reverence and joy, would we gaze upon the heroes, who struck for liberty at Lexington, at Saratoga, at Trenton and at Yorktown! How gladly would we behold the patriots, who in defense of that liberty, gave up their lives upon the battle fields of the South! We can, in imagination, at least recall their forms, we can, in reality, recount their deeds. Let us, then, cherish their virtues, let us emulate their actions, let us transmit, for an inheritance, to our children, the principles of individual worth and the broad ideas of state-craft, which they inculcated, and we may rest assured, that, when the next centennial sun shall course its way over our land, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, it shall then, as it does now, shine upon a people—united, prosperous, free.

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AN HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
NORTH KINGSTOWN,
DELIVERED AT WICKFORD

July 4th, 1876,

BY

David Sherman Baker, Jr.



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